

elementary teacher, per boy, monthly	50 denarii ⁵¹
arithmetic teacher, per boy, monthly	75 denarii
grammaticus (Greek or Latin language and literature, geometry), per student, monthly	200 denarii
teacher of rhetoric or public speaking, per student, monthly	250 denarii
teacher of architecture, per boy, monthly	100 denarii
clothing guarder at baths, ⁵² per bather	2 denarii
bath attendant, per bather	2 denarii

Prices For

boots, mule drivers' or farmworkers' first quality, without hobnails	120 denarii
boots, soldiers', without hobnails	100 denarii
shoes, patrician	150 denarii
shoes, senatorial	100 denarii
shoes, equestrian	70 denarii
boots, women's	60 denarii

The Grain Dole

The population of the city of Rome in the early imperial period was about one million. Some people had been forced to move to the city to seek employment when slave laborers had replaced them on the farms.⁵³ Others were attracted to the city because it was the political, financial, and entertainment capital of the Western world. And some people were brought to Rome as slaves but remained there as freedmen. Jobs were increasingly more difficult to find, and slaves and freedmen occupied many positions which, in another society, would be filled by free citizens of the lower class. In general, the life of the lower-class urban worker was harsh. Wages were low, prices were high, and jobs were sometimes only temporary. Free workers had no job security, no retirement benefits, no medical plans, and no unemployment insurance. Indeed, some free workers led harsher lives than some slaves, who were fed, clothed, and given medical care by their masters. Some people, both free and freed, therefore attached themselves to patrons who might help them along with gifts or money. Unfortunately, some patrons expected their clients to grovel in return for a handout.⁵⁴ The state provided welfare assistance in the form of a grain dole. In 122 B.C., Gaius Gracchus, a tribune,⁵⁵ brought forward a law to insure a low and unvarying grain price for Roman citizens. The government was to maintain a supply of

⁵¹ An elementary teacher thus needed at least 15 students in order to earn as much as a mule-driver.

⁵² A bather might bring his own slave to guard his clothes while he was bathing, or he might hire someone at the baths. On public baths, see selection 354.

⁵³ See selection 187.

⁵⁴ See selections 10–14.

⁵⁵ *tribune*: an elected public official; see selections 255–257. On Gaius Gracchus and his brother Tiberius, see selection 187.

grain⁵⁶ in public warehouses in Ostia⁵⁷ and to sell it in fixed monthly rations at a low price to Roman citizens. In 58 B.C., Publius Clodius Pulcher,⁵⁸ a tribune for that year, ingratiated himself with the urban proletariat by bringing forward a law that allowed Roman citizens to receive public grain free rather than at a reduced price. The availability of free grain, supplied in large part by subject provinces, has led scholars to describe ancient Rome as a "consuming city" rather than a "producing city." It has been estimated that, by the late republican period, most citizens were beneficiaries of the grain, which was distributed to male family members. The Roman lower class became very dependent on these monthly grain handouts, prompting more than one critic to say that the Romans were interested only in "bread and circuses."⁵⁹

The amount of grain available each year varied according to weather and soil conditions in the crop-growing regions. Shipping accidents, moreover, would cause losses of cargo and thus shortages in Rome. Although the emperors tried to establish consistency in the distribution system, they were not always able to avoid shortages.

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Tacitus, *Annals*, 6.13, 12.43

[In A.D. 32] a revolution almost occurred because of a serious problem with the grain supply. For several days, protests in the theater,⁶⁰ protests directed toward the emperor,⁶¹ were more frequent and more outspoken than usual. The emperor was infuriated and blamed the magistrates and the Senate because they had not kept the common people in check with the authority vested in them as public servants. He also made clear from what provinces he was bringing in grain and how much greater an amount of grain he was bringing in than his predecessor Augustus had. . . .

Many prodigies occurred [in A.D. 51]. . . . A shortage of grain and the resulting famine were regarded as prodigies. And the complaints of the people were not kept low or private. Instead they surrounded Claudius⁶² with angry clamoring when he was in court hearing cases; then they pushed and shoved him roughly to the very edge of the Forum until he escaped the hostile mob with the help of a band of soldiers. It was learned that the city had only fifteen days of grain left. Only the benevolence of the gods and the mildness of the winter relieved this desperate situation.

⁵⁶The grain came to Italy from the provinces, especially from Sicily, Egypt, and Africa. Some of it was grain paid by these provinces as "tribute"; see note 74 of this chapter. Grain was a staple of the Roman diet.

⁵⁷Ostia: the harbor of Rome; see note 71 of Chapter IV.

⁵⁸Publius Clodius Pulcher: see note 74 of Chapter III and also selection 229.

⁵⁹bread: the free grain was ground into flour and made into bread.

circuses: chariot races; see selections 381-388.

There were flaws in the grain dole system, as there are flaws today in the welfare system. Some unscrupulous Romans obtained grain dole privileges and then turned around and sold the free grain. However, the grain dole did keep many unemployed families from starvation.

⁶⁰It was very common for people to use the theater as the public place in which they would voice their complaints.

⁶¹the emperor: in A.D. 32, Tiberius, stepson of Augustus.

⁶²Claudius: emperor in A.D. 51. He was Augustus's grandson and Tiberius's nephew.